

Larmer Feels Blessed by Helping Others

~By LINDA BURCHETTE/Staff

Taking care of others and working hard is all Linda Larmer ever wanted to do. Of course, her compassion, ready smile and boundless energy fit perfectly with that noble goal.

A public health nurse for 30 years before retiring in 2002 and continuing part-time with the Saltville Medical Center for 11 years, serving with the Saltville Rescue Squad for 12 years, waitressing and raising a family, Larmer has relied upon that natural vitality as well as an in-born interest and kindness toward her fellow human beings.



Linda Larmer serves as an EMT with Saltville Rescue Squad.

It all began in her childhood.

Born to Lewis and Colene Blevins Combs and raised on a small dairy farm near South Fork, Linda and her twin sister, Brenda, and brother, Bobby, helped with chores on the farm, in the garden and in the kitchen.

"We learned how to set and

put up and grade tobacco, to plant beans, corn and cucumbers and gather and can them. We had chickens for eggs and pigs for ham and tenderloin. All the work we did, our parents went with us and showed us how to do the job right," Larmer said. "We worked and we played together. And on Sundays we went to church to worship our Lord and Savior."

Larmer said she has been blessed in her life, starting with a loving family while growing up which influenced her decision to go into healthcare.

"I have been blessed with caring and supportive parents and family," she said. "Joy and strength come from God and he gives me plenty to share. My prayer each day is that I can make a difference in someone's life for the better. That I can brighten their day with a smile, with a kind word or a helping hand."

It was her 12th-grade biology teacher, Mrs. Waters, who steered Larmer toward a nursing career.

"I was just a country kid that didn't want to go too far away from home," Larmer said. And she had discovered a talent and love for helping others while caring for her family

"My parents built their house next door to my grandparents, and Grandpa and Daddy farmed together. My mother and my sister and I helped with my grandmother who had Alzheimer's. Mother was always a caring person who'd give you the shirt off her back so it was easy going into a helping, caring profession. When my mother developed Alzheimer's I was able to retire after 30 years as a public health nurse and help with her care. She was up and about and loved to go, but needed help with daily activities like cooking and gardening. My sister also retired after 30 years at Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute and we were both available to help our parents. My brother had gone in with Daddy on the farm and we were often all together at the lunch table during the week as adults."

Both Linda and Brenda discovered they loved working with people in healthcare. While Linda went off to Johnston Memorial Hospital School of Nursing and eventually became a Registered Nurse, Brenda worked as a psychiatric aide at Southwestern State Hospital, which became SWMHI.

"I've never regretted it. I fit right in, being with people," Larmer said about her nursing career.

"At nursing school at JMH, we had more hands-on care with patients. In training, a back rub was a part of bedtime care. As a waitress (while in high school and until going to nursing school), I found that I enjoyed working with people and in nursing I learned that I loved caring for people."

Larmer graduated from JMH School of Nursing in 1969 with a diploma in nursing. Her first job was at a Catholic hospital in North Dakota, where she lived with her first husband, Doug Heffinger, who was in the Air Force, and they had a son, Kyle Heffinger.

"This gave me a wonderful foundation in nursing care," said Larmer of her duties on the medical floor of the hospital. "It gave me a chance to put principles into practice. On returning to Virginia (two years later), I worked six months at JMH on night duty on the OB floor and got to deliver one baby before the doctor arrived."

Back in Virginia, living in Chilhowie, Larmer's career was about to go into a new direction.

"In 1972, Betty Russell, a nurse who helped with my grandmother's home health care, told me of an opening in public health, and I applied and got the job as a public health nurse at the Bristol (Va.) Health Department with the Mount Rogers Health District. And so at 23 I started a job that I would retire from 30 years later."

Continued on page 13



"In public health, a nurse got to do many things," Larmer said, including work in clinics in the office, home health and hospice nursing at home, work with pregnant women and new mothers and their babies with WIC vouchers and immunizations. "We worked in the schools and with children who were born with special needs and we did mental health follow-up for patients discharged from SWSH years ago."

Larmer was influenced by a nurse she worked with in Bristol whose friendly personality would lay the foundation for how she would treat her patients.

"In Bristol I worked with a nurse named Angie Holding. She always had a smile and a kind word for those she came into contact with, whether it be a co-worker, a patient or a friend or stranger. I wanted my contacts with people - co-workers, patients, family and friends - to be the same tender loving care (TLC) that I would want my mother and my children to receive when they needed a nurse."

Linda remarried in 1974 and was blessed with a daughter, Maria Caudill, who came with her husband, Bill Larmer. She and Bill had a daughter, Angela Miller, and four years later a set of twins, Bill and Amy Larmer.

In 1979, Larmer transferred to Smyth County Health Department and soon after helped open a satellite office in Saltville at the Saltville Medical Center. Four years after that the satellite office moved into an old hospital building in Saltville and was active until funding issues led to its closure in December 2001. Larmer retired in February 2002 so she could take care of her mother, but went back to work part-time later that year.

During her time there, in 1987, Larmer was named Mount Rogers Health District Nurse of the Year, Southwest Virginia Regional Nurse of the Year and Virginia Public Health Nurse of the Year and she received an award from the governor.

"I knew nothing about Saltville when I started working there," Larmer said. "Over the years I came to know many families who taught me they were a community who took care of each other. Not a relationship of 'I'll scratch your back if you will scratch mine,' but one of love and service. If a neighbor saw a need, they reached out to help."

The Southwest Virginia Community Health System operates medical centers in Saltville, Meadowview, Tazewell and Bristol. Larmer went to work at the Saltville Medical Center part-time in August 2002. Not long before that, in 2001, she completed Emergency Medical Technician training and joined the Saltville Rescue Squad as a volunteer EMT. She continues today as an EMT as well as treasurer and a member of the board of directors.

"Somebody encouraged me to join the rescue squad," Larmer said. "I knew nothing about the squad, even as an R.N. I had to take an EMT class. The reason I've stayed with it is that there's a need for volunteers. With the rescue squad people are in need of emergency service and when they see the ambulance pull up they know help is there."

Larmer has also participated in many community organizations, including Saltville-Rich Valley Lions Club, People Inc. Head Start Policy Council in Abingdon, Mt. CAP Policy Council in Marion, Mt. CAP board of directors (chairman two years), Smyth County March of Dimes Walk America Committee and Grosses Creek Baptist Church team for March of Dimes Walk America and she worked

owner of the Lotusea Wellness Group of Johnson City, Tenn., which provides workplace wellness programs across the United States.

"She is a genuine nurse," said Breeding. "Linda is a person who loves her job and cares about everyone she works with. I often tell people that if you want to see a nurse you need to meet Linda Larmer. She definitely goes above and beyond the call of duty."

And when she has any spare time, Larmer says she enjoys spending time with her grandchildren, ranging in age from three to 20. She's also been able to travel to places like Germany, Nova Scotia, the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone, and she's worked and visited in numerous states across the country.

"Over the years I've been blessed to have worked with many wonderful co-workers, patients and friends. Each time I treated people with dignity and respect and I got it back," Larmer said. "Somebody who cares means as much to the young as to the old. They feel like they have someone who will listen, and you're not just talking to them because it's your job."

"All my life I have had the support of my family and many, many friends. My prayer has been for God to lead and guide me, and I feel that prayer has been answered. I have been blessed each day. Helping others gives me that blessing."

"I've been blessed," she said, "with having had a lifetime of living, a lifetime of work, a lifetime of play and a lifetime of serving the Lord."

A public health nurse for 30 years before retiring in 2002, Linda Larmer now works part-time at Saltville Medical Center. Here she talks with Misti and her daughter Kylie about flu vaccinations.

-photo by Linda Burchette



Elizabeth Fox

MD, FACOG
Board Certified OB/GYN

of Wythe Physicians For Women

is shaping the future of women's healthcare. Dr. Fox understands caring means reaching out to women with services that provide physical, social and emotional well-being. Being a female physician, Dr. Elizabeth Fox knows the importance of providing compassionate, supportive care along with cutting edge treatment options in the field of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Dr. Elizabeth Fox is dedicated to all aspects of women's health including:

1. Comprehensive Pregnancy Care including High Risk Obstetric Care & In-Office Ultrasounds • 3D/4D Ultrasounds - Now performing 3D/4D OB Ultrasounds for any expectant mother between 27 & 34 weeks of pregnancy, which includes the OB ultrasound session recorded on DVD in addition to pictures of the baby printed in 3D/4D.
2. Gynecology
 - Birth Control Options & Family Planning
 - Osteoporosis Screening & Management
 - Cancer Screening
 - Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Screening
 - Laparoscopic Hysterectomy
 - Menopause Management including Hormone Replacement Therapy
 - Management of Heavy Bleeding including Endometrial Ablation
 - Minimally Invasive Surgeries & When Necessary, Major Open Surgeries
 - Permanent Sterilization
 - Breast Health Care
 - Diagnosis and Treatment of Abnormal Pap Smears
 - Pelvic Pain Issues
 - 2nd Opinions for Surgery
3. Urogynecology
 - Incontinence (Urinary Leakage)
 - Overactive Bladder
 - Urinary Frequency
 - Bladder and Pelvic Pain

